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ABSTRACT

Covering the first 3 years of the Experimental Schools (ES) 6-year program (begun in 1971), this interim report presents: the conceptual design of the ES program; the 10 rural project sites and the 18 comparative school districts; the educational changes proposed by the ES projects; and the comprehensive evaluation design. Data presented on the research progress suggest: (1) the ES districts are indicative of a changing rural America that is less dependent upon farming and more economically diverse; (2) factors contributing to program readiness are social forces external to the school system, recognition in the system of unmet needs, experience in Federal programs, and administrative commitment to change; (3) factors contributing to project initiation are broad-based participation and influence, independence from extensive ES influence, school district acceptance of the project, and congruence between locally identified problems and project goals; (4) factors influencing quick implementation are expanding economy; high median family income; large, homogeneous, and geographically concentrated population; easy access to urban areas; and community satisfaction with community life; (5) influential organizational characteristics are experienced faculty, strong administrative leadership, teacher/administrator readiness for change, access to new educational ideas, coordination of teacher planning activities, and past experience with systematic educational change. (JC)

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Educational Change in Rural America

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Educational Change in Rural America

An Interim Report to the Experimental Schools Program

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Foreword

It is indeed a pleasure to share with those interested in strengthening formal education in rural communities this interim report on the *Longitudinal Study of Educational Change in Rural America*, a comprehensive research project being conducted by Abt Associates Inc. on behalf of the National Institute of Education. Due to be completed in 1978, this project plans reports to policymakers and practictioners which will include a wide range of research findings and recommendations applicable at the federal, state and local levels of government.

The achievement of these goals is being facilitated by the dedicated efforts of many individuals within the National Institute of Education, Abt Associates Inc. and the 28 rural school districts under study. David Budding, Robert Cunningham, Lynne Fender, Norman Gold and Jeffrey Schiller have served as federal project officers and in this capacity have played major roles in the determination of the objectives of the research. Wendy Peter Abt, Stephen J. Fitzsimmons, Michael B. Kane, Peter S. Miller, Donald N. Muse, and Sheila Rosenblum have held senior responsibilities within Abt Associates Inc. for the design and implementation of the cross-site portion of the research. They have been assisted in matters of data management by Frederick Luhmann, Mary O'Farrell, and Timothy Burns. Case study design and long term on-site research has been performed by Allan F. Burns, Charles A. Clinton, A. Michael Colfer, Carol Pierce Colfer, William L. Donnelly, Ronald P. Estes, Jr., William A. Firestone, Lawrence Hennigh, Stephen J. Langdon, Donald A. Messerschmidt, Charles I. Stannard and C. Thompson Wacaster. Andrea L. Kovacs has been responsible for the many office management tasks of the project since it began in July 1972.

The entire research endeavor owes a debt of gratitude to these individuals and to the many rural school administrators, teachers, pupils and community residents who have given their time so generously for the purposes of this research.

Robert E. Herriott
Project Director

Background

Abt Associates Inc. (AAI) was commissioned by the Experimental Schools program of the National Institute of Education (NIE) to conduct a multi-year documentation and evaluation of a set of educational field experiments. The project involves the study of ten rural school districts seeking to implement locally-initiated programs of comprehensive educational change. The project has a core staff based in Cambridge, Massachusetts; in addition, a professional AAI staff member was located in each school district, thus bringing long-term intensive field research capabilities to the study of planned educational change. NIE and AAI expect that through the combination of ethnographically oriented field work with more traditional cross-site survey and evaluation techniques new dimensions will be added to current knowledge of the change process.

This report covers the first three years of a six year effort. The reader should be aware of the fact that it is an interim report of an ongoing evaluation of an ongoing set of field experiments. Only when the entire change process has been observed can the nature of the relationships between its elements be fully understood and documented. An action that appears to be a failure early in the process may subsequently turn out to have been a wise strategy for a school district to have taken. Final conclusions and policy implications therefore, cannot be determined until the field experiments have been completed.

The Experimental Schools (ES) program began operations in 1971. ES represents an important change in the character of federal involvement in education. Until the mid-1950's, the initiative for educational innovation had been almost entirely in the hands of state and local officials. Toward the end of the 1950s and particularly in the 1960s, however, federal initiative increased dramatically. The typical federal approach used a variety of categorical grants to states and localities to stimulate a series of discrete educational reforms.

The optimism sustaining this approach, however, lessened in the early 1970s as evidence began to accumulate that it had not been effective in producing *lasting* educational change. ES was a reaction to this "piecemeal" change strategy of the 1960s. It was conceived as an applied research program designed to explore the effectiveness of a "holistic" change strategy in which many aspects of a local educational system undergo simultaneous change.

The philosophy of the ES program was that the success of the holistic strategy did not depend upon the development of new curricular ideas, but rather upon the adoption of available innovations in con-

junction with a series of structural changes designed to facilitate their becoming a lasting part of an educational system. Recognizing the unusual local commitment required for such a test, ES policies and procedures required that the design of each field project represent local wishes. In turn, the program gave *strong assurances* of federal support for *full funding* over a *five-year* period. *Active monitoring* of each project would be required, but *local designs* would be respected.

In order to satisfy the ES thrust for holistic change, any project funded by ES had to include the following five "facets of comprehensiveness":

- A fresh approach to the nature and substance of the total curriculum in light of local needs and goals;
- Reorganization and training of staff to meet particular project goals;
- Innovative use of time, space, and facilities;
- Active community involvement in developing, operating, and evaluating the proposed project; and
- An administrative and organizational structure to support the project and to take into account local strengths and needs.

In addition, each Experimental Schools project was expected to serve the entire enrollment of the school district, from kindergarten through grade 12.

On March 10, 1972, a competition for ES grants for small rural schools was announced. Three hundred nineteen districts responded. Six were given five-year commitments to plan and implement programs. Six others were awarded one-year planning grants; four of these districts were subsequently given commitments for an additional five years of support. Two requirements explicitly accompanied the commitment. First, funds could not be used to support activities already a part of the normal operating costs of the district nor could they be used primarily for construction of facilities or for renovation. Second, while support was for a five-year period, a key design requirement was that the district be able to continue any programmatic successes with its own resources once federal support was terminated. During the five-year project period, the ES funding level approximated 10 to 15 percent of the annual operating costs of the participating school districts.

The ten ES project sites were selected through a multi-step review process. Since the sites were not chosen "at random," the ability of subsequent research to differentiate between results due to the ES projects and those simply due to the character of the site was greatly constrained. Therefore, 18 other school districts were later selected randomly and recruited to serve as comparison districts, thus increasing

Figure 1
Geographical Location of Ten Experimental School Districts and Eighteen Comparison School Districts

the generalizability of the research effort. These 18 districts, which received no ES funding, together with the ten funded districts, are shown on the map in Figure 1. The educational changes proposed by the ten experimental districts cover a wide range, as shown in Figure 2.

The ES program required a *research approach* which could take advantage of the opportunity presented by the *field experiments*: the analogue to each comprehensive project was to be a comprehensive evaluation. Therefore, in addition to the design, development, and operation of field projects, the Experimental Schools strategy involved another basic and critical component: the documentation and evaluation of the field projects. This was the task assigned to Abt Associates Inc. in its *Longitudinal Study of Educational Change in Rural Amer-*

ica. ES planners felt a strong need to bring to the study of holistic change the contributions of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and political scientists. The nature of the proj cts required

Area of Educational Change	No. of ES School Districts Proposing
Curriculum:	
Career Education	6
Reading Programs	6
Early Childhood	5
Outdoor/Recreation	5
Adult Education	4
Mini-Courses	3
Student Support:	
Media and Learning Centers	5
Travel Opportunities	4
Cultural Enrichment	4
Student Services (Testing & Guidance)	3
Staff Support:	
Curriculum Planning and Development	6
Targeted In-Service Training	3

Figure 2
Selected Areas of Educational Change Proposed by ES School Districts

the development of comprehensive designs capable of combining a variety of evaluation research techniques. Furthermore, the research had to be developed and implemented in a manner which overcame a number of limitations that the literature on evaluation showed to be common to many previous evaluations (Figure 3).

PROBLEM	ES DESIGN ELEMENT
Evaluation brought in after the fact.	Evaluation start up to match project start up.
Low level funding resulting in limited types of study.	Major fiscal commitment to evaluation on order of 1:2 ratio to programming.
Documentation of what was attempted and what actually transpired missing.	Documentation of the Experiment to be a major component of the evaluation.
Fly-in-fly-out nature of evaluation studies.	Major on-site presence required for duration of the field experiment.
Evaluation commissioned to satisfy legislative requirements rather than to derive substantive information on a process.	Focus of ES evaluation to be research into basic nature of holistic change. Evaluation's purpose goes beyond simply reporting successes and failures to informing knowledge of schools and schooling.

Figure 3
ES Design Elements to Address Common Problems of Educational Evaluations

The Research Questions

The research being performed for the ES program by Abt Associates has been conceived to address four fundamental questions:

- What are the social, political and historical phenomena of the Experimental Schools?
- What has been the impact of this program on pupils, schools, and their communities?
- What changes persist beyond the period of federal funding?
- What is the knowledge gained through this program for educational policy makers and practitioners?

Five separate but coordinated research efforts have been developed to provide answers to these four questions. In order to implement these efforts On-Site Researchers (OSRs) trained in sociological and anthropological field methods are located full-time in each of the ten sites. A staff of additional professionals is located in Cambridge, Massachusetts and represents backgrounds in sociology, education, social psychology, psychology, and public policy analysis.

Two studies are responsive to the *documentation* objectives of the research. They are tailored to the unique characteristics of small school districts and are conducted individually within each of the ten research sites:

The Site History and Context Study (SHS). This study has been completed.* It consists of histories of each of the ten communities and their school systems prior to the inauguration of the ES project. Its research sought answers to the question:

- How did these ten communities and their school systems grow and develop from their founding to the advent of the ES program?

The Site Case Study (SCS). Using research techniques in the ethnographic tradition, a case study is being written about each community and its school system. Each case study seeks answers to the question:

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*Fitzsimmons, Stephen J., Peter C. Wolff, Abby Freedman (Eds.), *Rural America: A Social and Educational History of Ten Communities*, Vols. I and II, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Abt Associates Inc., April 15, 1975.

- How did local people work together to develop an ES project, what problems did they encounter and what solutions did they employ?

Three other studies address the *impact* objective of the research. They are cross-site studies; i.e., they study all sites in a uniform manner in order to increase our knowledge about those elements of the process of educational change which can be generalized to other educational settings.

The Community Change Study (CCS). This study deals with the interaction of the ES project and the community. Specifically, it addresses the question:

- How do a rural community and its people, culture, and institutions influence the school system (and its pupils) in the presence of the ES program; in turn, how does the school system (and its pupils) influence the community in the presence of the ES program?

The Organizational Change Study (OCS). This study focuses on the school districts within which the process of holistic change desired by the ES project takes place and which are in turn changed by the process. Specifically, it seeks answers to the question:

- What are the characteristics of schools and school districts which act either as facilitators or as obstacles to the change process?

The Pupil Change Study (PCS). This study seeks to determine the effects of the ES program on the attitudes, experiences, and achievements of pupils. Its central research question is:

- What characteristics of pupils are influenced by the process of comprehensive change?

Figure 4 summarizes the data collection plans of the studies described above.

As the research effort enters its later stages, a series of reports are planned to address the *relevance* objective of the research. These reports are intended to transform the data gained from the various studies into knowledge useful to a wide range of groups. They include:

- **MINI-REPORTS:** The primary communication medium for *practitioners, policy makers,* and *school clients.* These are short (20-50 page) reports written in a style and language appropriate to communicating specific knowledge to a specific audience.

- **SPECIAL REPORTS:** Intended for *prospective teachers and administrators,* these reports will be 200-400 pages in length and organized in the form of college texts or readers. Each will be focused on a particular topic of instructional value.

- **RESEARCH REPORTS:** Both interim and final research reports of the major studies will serve to communicate substantive information to a *research audience* and as technical backup for the content of the mini and special reports.

Data Source	Data Collection by School Year and District Type*									
	1972 – 73		1973 – 74		1974 – 75		1975 – 76		1976 – 77	
	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS
Pupil Attitude Questionnaire	▲		▲		▲		▲	▲	●	●
Pupil Achievement Test							▲	▲	●	●
Pupil Experiences Questionnaire	▲		▲		▲		▲	▲	●	●
Recent Graduate Questionnaire			▲		▲		▲	▲	●	●
Teacher Questionnaire	▲		▲		▲		▲	▲	●	●
Administrator Questionnaire	▲		▲				▲	▲	●	●
Resident Questionnaire			▲						●	
Community Official Interview			▲		▲		▲			
On Site Researcher Questionnaire	▲		▲		▲		▲			
School District Documents	▲		▲		▲		▲		●	
Community Documents	▲						▲			
Participant Observation	▲		▲		▲		▲			

*ES=Experimental School Districts; CS=Comparison School Districts, ▲=Data collected prior to July 1976
●=Data to be collected after July 1976

Figure 4
Data Collection Schedule

Research Progress and Plans

On the basis of the research performed to date, interesting data are emerging about the ten sites of the ES program as well as about the nature of the educational change process.

Nature of the Research Sites

The social and educational histories which have been completed for each of the ten field sites provide valuable data on rural America as a whole and on the ten sites in comparison to the rest of the nation. Certain trends can be observed, and most of these trends are visible more clearly in the ten sites than elsewhere. While the rural land area of America has been shrinking relative to urban and suburban areas, in recent years the population of rural communities has grown at a slightly greater rate than that of the rest of the nation. Per capita income is slightly higher in the ten field sites than in the rest of rural America; there are slightly fewer families below the poverty level and slightly more families of middle income (Figure 5).

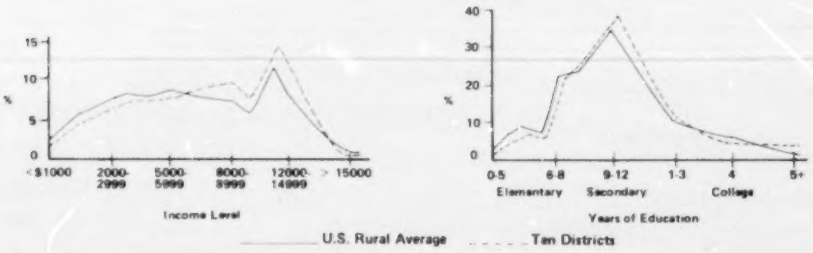
The ten sites are atypical (and slightly "more modern") when compared to rural America in terms of industrialization, and particularly in terms of manufacturing. Farming plays a less significant role in the ten communities, and industrial employment, especially in manufacturing, plays a more prominent role than in the rest of rural America.

In educational attainment, the ten school districts contain a slightly higher percentage of persons who have completed at least the 12th grade and a slightly lower percentage of people with less than a seventh grade education. In terms of post secondary education, there is little difference between the ten sites and the rest of rural America (Figure 5).

These data suggest that the ten ES school districts are indicative of what rural America is becoming — less dependent upon farming and more economically diverse.

The ten ES school districts include 52 schools. They are served by 892 professional personnel including 95 administrators; 90% of the professional personnel are full-time employees. Most of the teachers were raised or studied in local or nearby areas, and currently live in the community in which they work. The number of pupils per teacher in the ten districts is 20, compared to the national average of 24; the range in the ten districts is from 13 to 32.

Five of the ten school districts have experienced consolidation within the last 15 years. During that time period, a sixth district successfully resisted consolidation; it is, however, a union of three school districts which share a common superintendent. The other four ES districts experienced consolidation at earlier periods in their history.



(Source: 1970 U.S. Census of Population)

Figure 5
Percentage Comparison of the Population of Ten ES School Districts with the Population of all Rural (Non-SMSA) Districts, by Income Level and Education in 1969

In most districts, the motivating force behind the Experimental Schools proposal was the superintendent of schools. In all cases, the districts' proposals and plans stressed the need to better prepare their students for life both in their own localities and elsewhere. Local students, they said, were increasingly "turned off" and found their education "irrelevant" to the world of work most of them were about to enter. Prior to their ES participation, almost all the districts stressed traditional college preparatory programs at the expense of career or vocational education. The ES communities generally send less than 40% of their graduates to college; most of these students do not obtain a degree. Eighty percent of recent high school graduates who responded to a survey felt that local schools should place more emphasis on basic skills. They were evenly divided as to whether or not increased emphasis should be given to vocational training.

In most of the districts, approximately 50% of the graduating seniors remain in the community. When asked about their plans only 12% of those students queried at the outset of the ES program indicated a desire to live in their communities after graduation; one third definitely plan to live outside the local area and another third would prefer to do so. Preliminary comparisons of these students' responses to other survey items indicate that along several dimensions, such as self-esteem, political attitudes, social development and occupational goals, the ES students are quite similar to those in non-rural areas.

Two characteristics which any ES program was expected to exhibit were community involvement in developing project plans and curricular reform responsive to local needs. On-site observation indicates resident involvement to be uneven and generally fairly limited. Data concerning many aspects of community life and a survey of resident attitudes toward community needs indicate that the ES communities differed considerably from one another both in terms of the resources they possess which could be drawn upon to support ES programs and in the local problems which ES plans could address. Comparison of the final plans with these data indicates that community resources which could have been utilized for program support often remained untapped. The plans tended to deal with certain areas such as adult illiteracy, health problems and environmental protection, but many other problem areas were ignored. Resident dissatisfaction with various areas of community life generally was not reflected in ES plans.

When the entire study is concluded, these and other quantitative cross-site data will be supplemented by the qualitative data of the case studies. Through these studies the importance of different levels of community involvement and other variables will be better understood. The case studies will pay particular attention to the reasons behind strategies pursued by school leaders as they initiated and implemented the ES projects as well as to the effects of these strategies. Even now, however, some general findings can be reported about the educational change process.

Nature of the Change Process

Understanding the changes in these ten rural school districts is aided by a research conceptualization which views change as a process consisting of four stages: readiness, initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. One of the eventual aims of this research is to discover whether (and how) performance during one stage is related to performance during later stages. At present, only the readiness and initiation stages have been completed by the ES projects, although some partial data exist for the implementation stage.

Factors Associated with Early Stages of Planned Change. There are four factors which seem to have played a role in a district's *readiness* (i.e., in its willingness to pursue opportunities presented by the ES program). They are:

- *social forces* external to the school system influencing it to change;
- *recognition* within the school system of unmet educational needs;
- *experience* within the school system with federal programs of educational improvement; and

- *commitment* of the administrative leadership to the type of change envisioned by the ES program.

For each of these factors a wide range of behavior was exhibited by the schools selected for ES participation. For example, with respect to external social forces, some districts had only just completed school consolidation when the ES program announcement was made. In another district, racial desegregation had recently been achieved. In still other districts there were no dramatic changes present in the socio-cultural environment. Regarding internal recognition of unmet needs, in some districts assessments which received wide publicity in local media had been carried out by groups external to the formal organization of the schools. Other districts had recently carried out such assessments themselves, while in still others no recent formal assessments or evaluations had taken place.

Five factors in the change process have been identified as important to the *initiation* of the projects (i.e., to the development of their formal project plans):

- *broad-based participation* in the identification of specific needs which could be met by the new project;
- *broad-based influence* in the formulation of ES project plans;
- *independence* from extensive influence of the ES program in formulating the project plans;
- *acceptance* by school district staff of the project as formally planned; and
- *congruence* between locally identified problems and the specific goals stated in the formal plan of the project.

As was the case with the readiness factor, the ES schools exhibited a wide range of behavior on each of the factors identified. However, it must be noted that seemingly inadequate readiness or initiation behavior need not necessarily be associated with a lack of future success in implementation and institutionalization. For example, tentative findings from several case studies indicate that in some cultural settings subordinate participation in decision-making at the initiation stage may be absolutely requisite to avoid frustration or outright sabotage of the innovation. These same studies find, however, that continued close involvement of the same personnel may act as a barrier to implementation, as the day-to-day matters of routine school operation exhaust the energy available for change efforts. Another case study indicates that

while residents were involved in an early stage, as the project was implemented their involvement diminished completely, and concurrently some components of the project were seriously modified or dropped. How that will affect progress at subsequent stages remains to be seen. The concept of success itself may also be problematic; another early case study finding indicates that important differences exist between federal and local meaning attached to the goals, implementation and evaluation of ES projects.

Although research into the relationship between factors in various stages of the change process is continuing, one finding in particular deserves comment. In districts which suffered from a low degree of commitment to change by the administrative leadership during the readiness stage, *strong initiatives on the part of the external agency to facilitate successful initiation were generally badly misunderstood and counterproductive.*

This suggests a serious problem for a federal agency committed to assisting local educational agencies to plan and implement change. When districts of submarginal readiness are selected for participation in programs of externally-induced planned change, the agency responsible for their funding seems to be faced with a dilemma: if it adopts a "laissez-faire" attitude toward the district and makes little or no attempt to influence its planning process, the local district is not likely to develop a useful plan. If, on the other hand, the agency adopts a more aggressive posture, it is likely that the plan which results will be viewed as being "Washington's plan." Under either circumstance successful implementation of a change project seems unlikely.

Some Observations About Early Implementation. The plans produced during the initiation stage varied in the comprehensiveness of the changes to be implemented. They also varied in terms of how "big," how "widespread." and how "difficult" the changes were.

Large-scale changes which were implemented quickly occurred in *curricular* areas but they were usually not of a difficult nature to implement. Districts giving less stress to curricular areas tended to be engaged in major *staff development* efforts. It appears that districts may not be able *simultaneously* to introduce major change in curriculum and staff development during an early implementation period. Some opted for the effect of sweeping but easy change while others emphasized fewer but more difficult changes. Which approach results in changes which persist beyond the period of federal funding (i.e., become institutionalized) is a question to be addressed in subsequent reports.

Variations in the degree to which comprehensive change plans have been placed in operation are related to both community and organiza-

tional characteristics. In comparing communities, those which had school districts that were able quickly to implement ES programs, showed the following characteristics:

- An expanding economy,
- A high median family income,
- A large population,
- A geographically concentrated population,
- A homogeneous population in terms of culture and social characteristics,
- Easy access to metropolitan areas,
- A considerable period of time since school district consolidation, and
- Satisfaction among residents with community life.

In terms of organizational characteristics and compared to those districts which were slow implementers, those ES school districts which implemented more rapidly possessed:

- A more experienced faculty,
- Stronger leadership from key administrators,
- Teachers and administrators more dissatisfied with previously existing programs and services and more ready for change,
- More teachers and administrators with recent access to new educational ideas,
- More frequent coordination of teacher planning activities, and
- Greater past experience with systematic educational change.

Project implementation efforts in the ten ES school districts are continuing at the time of this report. The findings just presented pertain only to the early period of this stage of the change process.

Future Research Plans

The Longitudinal Study of Educational Change in Rural America comprises several component studies. Since the overall study is longitudinal, several of the component studies are still in progress: new data are being collected while data for the first few years of the study are already being analyzed. One of the component studies, the *Site History and Context Study*, however, has been completed. Its purpose was to study and describe the ten field sites historically in order to provide a context for understanding the Experimental Schools projects in each of the sites.

Plans for the other component studies may be summarized as follows:

Pupil Change Study. Pupils are being studied in three different ways. *First*, pupil changes in both cognitive and affective domains are being compared over a two-year period at four points in the schooling process: in grades 2 and 3, grades 4 and 5, grades 7 and 8, and grades 11 and 12. These comparisons are made in 28 rural school districts — the 10 ES districts and the 18 comparison districts. The purpose of the comparison is to obtain estimates of the effects on pupils that result from the ES program, from federal funding in general, and from the characteristics of the 10 school districts that resulted in their selection for the ES program.

Secondly, we shall try to predict pupil changes on the basis of the characteristics of the communities, the school districts, the superintendents, and the teachers. This will be done by examining the relationships between these variables and pupil change.

Thirdly, we shall attempt to correlate pupil changes in some important domains such as achievement and self-esteem with other pupil characteristics such as attitudes and self-reports on school experiences.

Organizational Change Study. The ultimate aim of this study is to gain an understanding of what causes some school districts to be more successful than others in implementing planned change, by examining the entire process of change. This process, however, is not linear in terms of "success." That which occurs in early stages of the change process influences subsequent stages, but not necessarily in a straightforward way. Using analytic techniques appropriate to a small sample, this study is exploring the variety of ways in which the stages of change are linked, in order to determine how factors at each stage contribute to, or detract from, effectiveness at later stages and, if possible, ultimate success or failure.

We will identify appropriate federal and local initiatives which facilitate the realization of aspirations for educational change, help in the rational planning for comprehensive change, encourage community participation in educational decision-making, and enable school districts to adapt to broad societal changes.

Community Change Study. Using statistical techniques appropriate to the sample of 10 school districts, this study is analyzing the exchanges between school systems and their communities which took place during the period of ES funding. Changes in the community before and after the ES projects will be reported. Analyses of the relation-

ships between such changes and the exchanges at various times between school systems and communities will be conducted. In addition, the contribution of ES projects to the quality of life in their communities will be analyzed.

Site Case Studies. These case studies dealing with the nature of the ES projects and the communities in which they are being implemented cannot be completed until federal funding for the projects has been terminated. When they are completed, the case studies will comprise ten distinct ethnographic descriptions of the relationships among ES projects, schools, and communities. Through their depth of description and detailed analysis of events, they will complement the insights of the other research studies.

The ultimate aim of the *Longitudinal Study of Educational Change in Rural America* is, of course, to develop policy relevant research findings that will help rural school districts do a better job of educating their children, that will help federal agencies better understand their influence on rural communities and rural people when they provide funding for "planned educational change," and that will help educational practitioners at all levels in dealing appropriately with the educational change process. It is our hope and expectation that when the *Longitudinal Study* is complete we will be able to present findings that are demonstrably relevant to these and perhaps other educational goals and policies.